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1994/10/00

Background on Interview in Houston

Enclosed are the business cards from the Chinese representatives who approached a NASA space station official at a public aerospace conference sponsored by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, which was held September 27, 1994, in Huntsville, Alabama. The Chinese representatives went up to Mr. DiMarcantonio, who had given a speech on the status of the Space Station program. They asked how a nation would go about becoming a member of the partnership. Prior to this occasion, Mr. Trafton had given direction to employees of the Space Station office, if approached by any Chinese officials, to listen courteously and refer any inquiries to the government-level. In keeping with this, Mr. DiMarcantonio told them that this would require an inquiry from the Chinese government to the U.S. government, and negotiations at high levels of the government. When asked if there is room for additional modules, the response was that this question is an engineering one; NASA executes policy decided by the government.

The interview with Mr. Trafton and Mr. Brinkley was a lengthy, wide-ranging interview on the Space Station program. In the course of that interview, questions were raised about the ability of the program to accommodate new partners. Mr. Trafton indicated that the Administrator had directed the program to develop a process that was flexible to accommodate new partners in later years (2005). Mr. Brinkley noted that the program is developing a new process for operations and utilization which is flexible enough to allow for participation by non-partners, additional partners, or allowing a country "with a checkbook" to barter with an existing partner. When Mr. Trafton noted that we could accommodate a partner who "came with a checkbook," this was meant to indicate that partners would only be considered if they brought space capabilities to the partnership. Mr. Trafton noted that the latter case is already provided for in the existing agreements.

When asked if NASA has been approached by any other countries, Mr. Trafton said that Chinese officials had approached a NASA representative, who had listened and directed their inquiries through appropriate channels.

All of the comments were in the context of a hypothetical situation, not something that is currently planned. The author of the article created a headline story out of comments taken out of context.

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